

## § 3430.32

feedback and comments on their proposals, and processes the awards in as timely a manner as possible.

### § 3430.32 Preliminary application review.

Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review will be made of all applications for responsiveness to the administrative requirements set forth in the RFA. Applications that do not meet the administrative requirements may be eliminated from program competition. However, CSREES retains the right to conduct discussions with applicants to resolve technical and/or budget issues, as deemed necessary by CSREES.

### § 3430.33 Selection of reviewers.

(a) *Requirement.* CSREES is responsible for performing a review of applications submitted to CSREES competitive award programs in accordance with section 103(a) of AREERA (7 U.S.C. 7613(a)). Reviews are undertaken to ensure that projects supported by CSREES are of high quality and are consistent with the goals and requirements of the funding program. Applications submitted to CSREES undergo a programmatic evaluation to determine the worthiness of Federal support. The scientific peer review or merit review is performed by peer or merit reviewers and also may entail an assessment by Federal employees.

(b) *CSREES Peer Review System.* The CSREES Application Review Process is accomplished through the use of the CSREES Peer Review System (PRS), a Web-based system which allows reviewers and potential reviewers to update personal information and to complete and submit reviews electronically to CSREES.

(c) *Relevant training and experience.* Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields taking into account the following factors:

(1) Level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, and extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities.

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(2) Need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, and extension fields.

(3) Need to include as reviewers other experts (*e.g.*, producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs.

(4) Need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (*e.g.*, colleges, universities, industry, State and Federal agencies, private profit and nonprofit organizations) and geographic locations.

(5) Need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution.

(6) Need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

(d) *Confidentiality.* The identities of reviewers will remain confidential to the maximum extent possible. Therefore, the names of reviewers will not be released to applicants. If it is possible to reveal the names of reviewers in such a way that they cannot be identified with the review of any particular application, this will be done at the end of the fiscal year or as requested. Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. Reviewers are expected to be in compliance with CSREES Confidentiality Guidelines. Reviewers provide this assurance through PRS.

(e) *Conflicts of interest.* During the evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined. Reviewers are expected to be in compliance with CSREES Conflict-of-Interest Guidelines. Reviewers provide this assurance through PRS.